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FM AMEMBASSY BISHKEK
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INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING IMMEDIATE 1904
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO IMMEDIATE 0018
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA IMMEDIATE 0031
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE 0496
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE 0310
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU IMMEDIATE 0028
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE 0184
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE 0442
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE IMMEDIATE 2316
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 1701
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000050

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SUBJECT: KULOV OUT AS KYRGYZ PRIME MINISTER?

REF: BISHKEK 46

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Classified By: Amb. Marie L. Yovanovitch, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. According to several well-placed Kyrgyz and other officials, it appears increasingly likely that Acting PM Felix Kulov's candidacy will be voted down in Parliament on a procedural point that will effectively ease Kulov out of office. The Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee that is behind this machination has close ties to President Bakiyev, and it is hard to imagine this is not being done without the President's approval. This appears to be a cold betrayal of Kulov -- who supported the President during the November demonstrations -- by Bakiyev. Kulov's immediate fate is uncertain -- he could move to the opposition, receive appointment to another top government post or, less likely, go into exile as Ambassador to a large country. Regardless of the outcome of Parliament's voting, Felix Kulov will remain a political figure with a long-term future in Kyrgyzstan. End Summary.

SULTANOV LAYS OUT A POST-KULOV SCENARIO

12. (C) On January 23, Ambassador and Central Asia Office Director Pamela Spratlen met with Speaker of the Parliament Marat Sultanov. Sultanov indicated that on January 24 there would be a secret vote on whether to accept the finding of the Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Legislation that the President's re-nomination of Felix Kulov to the post of prime minister, following the Parliament's previous rejection of Kulov, violated national legislation (reftel). Sultanov said that he is recommending to deputies that they accept the Committee's interpretation, as it gives the

parliament more maneuvering room. He said that he believes the secret vote will allow deputies to vote their consciences, and it is clear he expects that the parliament will accept the Committee recommendation.

13. (C) Sultanov said that if the Committee's view prevails, the President had already agreed to enter into discussions with parliamentary factions on who should be the next prime minister. Sultanov said the President was not in a "confrontational" mood and was ready to compromise. Moreover, Sultanov said there are other ways to keep the tandem intact; the President could appoint Kulov to the State Secretary slot or some other government position. (Comment:

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the State Secretary does not have to be confirmed by Parliament, but one of the President's closest allies, Adakhan Madumarov, currently occupies that slot, and it is not clear where he would go in such an event)- unless it is to the PM slot. End Comment.)

KULOV ACKNOWLEDGES REALITY

14. (C) In a separate meeting on January 23, Ambassador and Spratlen met with Acting Prime Minister Kulov. Calm as ever, Kulov acknowledged that he might not be Prime Minister for much longer, but suggested that he has views on how to solve the problem. (Comment: We note that as the Ambassador and Spratlen left Kulov's office, standing outside waiting to see Kulov was Za Reformi leader, and vehement Kulov critic MP Temir Sariyev. We can only assume they were discussing the next day's vote.) However, if Kulov's ideas don't work, he said that it was completely possible that he could come back as Prime Minister at a later point.

THE RUSSIAN EMBASSY VIEW

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15. (C) On the margins of a conference on January 24, DCM discussed current Kyrgyz political developments with Russian Embassy Economic Counselor Valery Shageyev. Shageyev, who has been in Bishkek for five years, noted that Russian investors are extremely frustrated by the current political paralysis where no decisions are being made. He then commented, "but (Acting PM) Kulov will be confirmed and there will be a new government soon." DCM replied that we were hearing otherwise, that Parliament might vote on whether Kulov could be nominated twice, and may decide he can't be, forcing President Bakiyev to nominate a new PM. Shageyev replied that that scenario didn't make sense. Kulov would be dangerous in the opposition. Shageyev quickly phoned a journalist contact of his, who confirmed that Parliament would be voting on whether Kulov could be nominated twice.

16. (C) Shageyev later called a contact who used to be highly placed in the Presidential Administration and still had access. The contact confirmed to Shageyev that "Kulov is out." Bakiyev will not appear in Parliament to support Kulov's nomination. The situation offered Bakiyev a convenient way to get rid of Kulov. There were two "variants." Either Kulov would be eased out with an Ambassadorship to the EU or the US. Or, Kulov would go into the opposition. Shageyev's source said Kulov would not be much of a threat in the opposition; his party was divided, and Kulov was not necessarily welcome back. The opposition was divided, too, and would not unite around Kulov. Shageyev commented this second variant did not make a lot of sense; sending Kulov out of the country to an Embassy would be a better outcome for Bakiyev.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) It seems increasingly likely that the Parliament will uphold the Constitutional Legislation Committee's recommendation, effectively denying Kulov the prime ministerial slot. Kulov himself seems quite sanguine about that prospect and clearly believes that he has a significant political future; we tend to agree that it is a little early to count Kulov out. It is hard for us to imagine Kulov accepting an ambassadorial post -- unless forced -- as exile abroad does not improve his political chances at home.

¶8. (C) We continue to find it hard to believe that the Committee on Constitutional Legislation is acting independently of the White House. The legal interpretation seems tailor-made to a desired outcome (and not consistent with the Parliament's previous disregard for parliamentary regulations as recently as December 30 when the parliament voted on the latest constitution). Moreover, the Committee Chairman, Iskhak Masalyev is a southerner and close to President Bakiyev. However, while there is clearly a plan to get rid of Kulov, it is not clear how well-thought out the plan is and where it will lead the country.

¶9. (C) Commenting on possible alternative candidates for the post of prime minister, Shageyev mentioned Deputy PM Usenov, and Minister of Industry Kerimkulov. It is also possible that Speaker Sultanov could be a credible candidate for prime minister)- and he would certainly have the inside track for parliamentary approval. He also fits Presidential Deputy Chief of Staff Sadyrkulov's criteria of a young and active economist.

YOVANOVITCH